

281807

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF
 IRANIAN HISTORY

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Dem. No:	281807
Tas. No:	355 OXF H

OXFORD
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

2012

Kaqarlar

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CHAPTER 14

QAJAR IRAN (1795–1921)

MANSOUREH ETTEHADIEH
 NEZAM-MAFI

THE REIGN OF AGHA MOHAMMAD SHAH
 (1795–98 CE/1209–12 AH)

The Qajar period, which lasted from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century, presented many distinctive features never before seen in Iranian history. The most important of these is the gradual western influence that came to dominate the political, economic, and social life of the country. This caused the Iranians to awake to the dangers facing the independence of their country. The result was an attempt by the government and intellectuals to seek remedies to put a stop to the threat of European dominance.

The Qajars were a tribe of Turcoman origin based around Astarabad in north-eastern Iran. They were associated with the Safavid dynasty, and came into prominence in the sixteenth century. Following the fall of the Safavids in 1722/1134 at the hands of the Afghans, Nader Afshar became king and ruled until 1747/1160. After his death, there followed a half century of civil war and a breakdown of law and order. Northeastern Iran remained in the hands of Nader's descendants, but central, western, and southern Iran were contested between the Qajar leader Mohammad Hasan Khan and Karim Khan Zand. Mohammad Hasan Khan was killed in 1759/1172, and his son Agha Mohammad Khan, who had been castrated in his youth by one of the Afshars, was taken hostage by Karim Khan. Karim Khan never assumed the crown and was known as the *Vakil al-Ro'aya*, the deputy of the people. He ruled for twenty-one years, during which time he brought some peace and stability to the realm.

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